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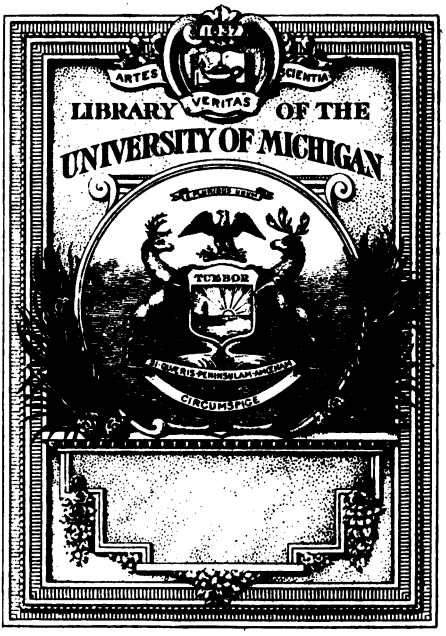
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MORE SHORT PLAYS

MORE SHORT PLAYS

FOR AMATEURS

BY

MRS. BARRY PAIN

LONDON
CHAPMAN & HALL, LIMITED
11 HENRIETTA STREET, W.C.
1908

21 Nov. 09

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE REASON WHY	1
A QUICK CHANGE	17
MRS. GUTHERIDGE	47
'WARE WIRE	55
THE BRIDGE PARTY	85
THE LADY TYPIST	95

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190591

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE REASON WHY	1
A QUICK CHANGE	17
MRS. GUTHERIDGE	47
'WARE WIRE	55
THE BRIDGE PARTY	85
THE LADY TYPIST	95

190591

THE REASON WHY

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

HE. | SHE.

SCENE: MRS. GRAFTON'S *drawing-room.*

TIME: 5.30 P.M.

This play can be acted without a curtain.

THE REASON WHY

A DIALOGUE

Discovered: MR. *and* MRS. HARRY GRAFTON. *He is in frock-coat. She is in smart afternoon reception-gown. He is sitting in an armchair, holding a magazine and large paper-knife. She is pacing the room, but pausing continually to look out of the window.*

DOORS R. AND L.

SHE.

It's the most extraordinary thing that has ever happened. *Don't* sit there like a piece of meat, brandishing that knife as if you were going to carve yourself.

HE.

Do you wish me to stand up and dance a hornpipe, or what? Perhaps you would like me to take a pantechnicon and go and fetch the people?

SHE.

Don't talk nonsense. Half-past five, and not one

solitary cat. It's becoming positively farcical. What does it mean?

HE.

I've told you about twenty times what I think it means. You've made some tom-fool blunder in the invitations.

SHE.

And haven't I shown you the sample card about forty times? What can be plainer? "Mrs. Harry Grafton at Home, Thursday, December 17th, 4 to 6." Oh, if only I had put R.S.V.P.! Never again will I give a party in a poke, so to speak. Of course if I hadn't been away just this fortnight I should have seen people, and found out pretty well who was coming and who wasn't. But that not one single soul should turn up!

HE.

[*Nodding towards open door left.*] And that you should have prepared for the British Army!

SHE.

[*Looking through the same door.*] What nonsense! It doesn't look at all too much. Usual things; nothing more. I had to prepare for all *in case* they all came. Sometimes they even bring horrible aunts

and things with them. How I do hate other people's friends— Wait! Was that somebody? [*Listens.*

HE.

It wasn't the bell, if that's what you mean. You've got bells on the brain.

SHE.

Well, can you wonder? Oh dear, I've a good mind to have another cup of tea.

HE.

I think you might safely finish the lot.

SHE.

Harry, don't.

HE.

[*Rising and walking about.*] I should now definitely chuck this entertainment if I were you——

SHE.

This entertainment has chucked me.

HE.

And take a good walk to restore your mental balance.

SHE.

How can I? There s still half an hour in which somebody *might* come.

HE.

It doesn t seem over likely.

SHE.

[*Rushing to the window.*] There, I'm sure that was a bell.

HE.

If you hear the bell again you shall see a doctor. Can't you get some occupation? Don't keep lashing up and down like something at the Zoo. Can't you take a book or a——

SHE.

[*Sitting.*] The book isn't written that could hold my attention for two seconds just now. What must the servants be thinking? I know those two girls are giggling themselves ill behind that buffet. They shall both leave to-morrow.

HE.

Well, I think you might admit that there is a dash of humour in the situation.

SHE.

[*With asperity.*] I fail to see it.

HE.

[*Fidgeting with the ornaments.*] You mean you fail to appreciate it?

SHE.

[*Excitedly.*] But the whole thing is incredible. My head will *split* trying to unravel the mystery of it. Here have I been standing about in this sinfully expensive gown since twenty to four, not to speak of *you* walled up in that collar, and not a soul has been near us. It's like a nightmare. Oh, do sit down, and don't look for prices on all the ornaments, or I shall go mad.

HE.

[*Sitting near window.*] Hope none of them are as cheap as we are.

SHE.

How you can joke about it passes me altogether. Harry! [*Jumps up and puts her hands on his shoulders from behind.*] You . . . It couldn't be anything connected with anything on the . . . Stock Exchange?

HE.

What *do* you mean?

SHE.

Do you think people could have misunderstood—misconstrued anything that you've done there lately? People are so funny, you know, and so keen on any sort of scandal. I can't think of anything else that *could* explain it. If it had got about—mistakenly, of course—that you had——

HE.

I'm sorry to dash your fondest hopes, my dear child, but as it happens it's out of the question. That's absolute and final.

SHE.

[*Desperately.*] Well, then, what *have* you done? There must be some reason why people shun the house as if it were plague-stricken. Haven't people rushed here hitherto on the slightest provocation? Haven't all my parties been perfectly successful? You remember that last At Home in June, when I had nothing more than a recitation to throw them, and it poured with rain, and yet they all flocked in as if it were the deluge and this was the ark. *Some* reason there must be for this sudden change. Something must have happened whilst I was at Guildford. That conviction has been growing upon me with every moment. [*Dramatically.*] Harry, what is it?

HE.

[*Rising.*] Look here. It's lucky for you that I've got a fairly good temper. Every night almost, during your confounded absence, I've been asked out by some one or other, as you know perfectly well from my letters. By George, though, it's not a bad idea you've given me. [*Begins to pace the room.*] It's just possible that there were some things down at Guildford which you omitted to describe in your letters, and which every one else would naturally hear about before me. I told you when you went that I didn't care about your stopping in the same house with that bounder Thornton. I noticed, by the way, that you were careful never to mention his beastly name in your letters. Heaven knows what stories he may have set afloat. He wouldn't stick at anything—the vainest, vulgarest, most unscrupulous fool going. That's what it'll be. He's back, and he's putting some spicy story about. Of course I can't know whether you've given him anything to go upon. He wouldn't want more than just enough. I warned you of him. I told you what he said about Mrs. Charlie Appling, and the story he told at the club about the Somerfell girls—absolutely without foundation. That's the sort of man he is. We oughtn't to know him. As you say, there must be *some* reason for no one turning up when thirty were asked. Phew! London isn't fit to live in.

SHE.

[*With dignity.*] If you're quite done, and feel like taking a breath, I may tell you that Mr. Thornton was *not* at Guildford, as it happened. He was laid up on his yacht. I forgot to mention it to you. Now you can go on a little more.

HE.

Why couldn't you have said that before? And if it isn't that, [*dramatically*] what in the name of wonder is it?

SHE.

Don't ask *me*. [*Dropping on to a chair.*] I—I could howl, only I daren't before six o'clock. You—you don't think it could have anything to do with that rash that Baker had on her face? She opens the front door, you know, and people may have seen it and thought it was infectious and spread it about.

HE.

The rash?

SHE.

The rumour—that we had the measles or something in the house.

HE.

Madness! As if that would get round to all our

most intimate friends without my ever hearing of it. ~~Skittles!~~ [*A bell rings.*

SHE.

[*Rushing to the window.*] There, that *is* the bell. It isn't a carriage. Some one on foot at the door. Wish I could see. Put that mat straight. Where's your magazine? We musn't look as if we'd been waiting in agonies. Oh, *why* didn't I put a few used cups and plates about! Idiot that I am! The buffet will give us clean away.

HE.

The clean buffet will give us away. Well, whoever comes now will naturally expect to find that every one else has left.

SHE.

So they will, and that the cups and things have been cleared. I shall talk about it as if it had been a great success. Back me up. We must refer to its having got so dreadfully warm in here. Small rooms for a crowd. *So* inconvenient. That sort of thing.

HE.

[*Straightening his tie, &c.*] Anything you like, in or out of reason. I hope it's somebody decently interesting.

SHE.

Why doesn't Baker bring them up? Have they fallen asleep on the staircase? I don't believe she's heard the bell. All servants are deaf.

[*Exit hastily door left.*

HE.

[*Alone.*] If this isn't somebody pretty thrilling I'm off to the club. I've had nearly enough of it. No man alive can be asked to spend his whole afternoon——

SHE.

[*Re-entering very dejectedly with a letter.*] It was the post. One circular. [*Reads.*] "Artificial teeth bought. Best prices. Full value."

HE.

Well, it's pleasant to think that some one wants to have dealings with us. But look here, dear, you won't mind if I appear to give up now, and go to the club for a bit, will you?

SHE.

The club? I wonder you've got the nerve.

HE.

I haven't the nerve to stand any more of this, and that's the truth. I'm awfully sorry for you, dear.

Some day, I suppose, we shall know what it was all about.

SHE.

I only hope that when it *does* come out I shall feel able to share your disgrace in the proper spirit and to——

HE.

Oh, for heaven's sake don't begin that again. Haven't I just as much right—or just as little—to attack you? But why quarrel when we've got nothing to quarrel about, as far as we know? We won't talk any more about it Don't think any more about it. Ta, ta! I sha'n't be long. Cheer up!

SHE.

[*Dismally.*] Don't be long. Good-bye.

[HE *exits door centre.*

SHE.

[*Alone.*] Never have I spent such a humiliating, disgusting, despairing afternoon. [*Looking round.*] All my lovely flowers that took such ages to arrange, not to speak of the twelve and ninepence. And the refreshments! What *am* I to do with all those hateful cakes? Send them to the nearest hospital, I suppose. And what shall I say to Baker and the others? Will they all give me notice? I shouldn't be a bit surprised. I really think we shall have to go

abroad—at any rate for a while. I couldn't face the scandal, especially if I hadn't deserved it.

HE.

[*Re-entering in top hat, and pulling on a fur coat.*] I say——

SHE.

Hullo! Is it really cold enough again for that great bearskin?

HE.

Rather. It's freezing like anything. I say, shall we do a play to-night to drown our sorrows, little girl?

SHE.

[*Helping him on with his coat.*] Well, it *would* be rather nice if we could get places at the back somewhere, where people couldn't see us and cut us. Dear me, Harry, what *do* you carry about in your pockets? Spoils your elegant appearance. [*Plunges her hand into his pocket, and draws out a pile of unopened letters.*] Letters?—Harry!—Harry—Look! *My* letters!! The invitations for to-day!! All of them!!! Oh—*Oh!*

[*She sinks overcome on to a chair.*

HE.

[*Petrified.*] By Jeremy!

SHE.

Oh, you *man!* How can you ever look me in the face again?

HE.

I can't.

[*Drops on to a chair, and puts his hat over his face.*

SHE.

And to think that—— No, it's beyond words. To forget to post *one* letter is sinful enough, but thirty letters! Where are the servants? Baker! Ford! [*Exit tempestuously at door left.*

HE.

[*Going.*] I think I had better look sharp and take the Royal Box at the Opera for to-night. Phew!

[*Exit furtively door centre.*

A QUICK CHANGE

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

AUSTIN FREEMANTLE.	PANSY DALE.
JOE FREEMANTLE (*his nephew, a doctor*).	MRS. HURST.

SCENE: *The Library in* AUSTIN FREEMANTLE'S *house in Bedford Square. Doors centre, right, and left. Comfortable old-fashioned furniture. Invalid's couch by fire, etc.*

TIME: *A winter morning.*

A QUICK CHANGE

Curtain rises on empty stage. MRS. HURST, *in cap and black silk apron, opens door C. and ushers in* JOE FREEMANTLE, *in frock-coat and top-hat, and* PANSY DALE, *in pretty walking costume.**

MRS. HURST.

No, sir, Mr. Freemantle won't be long now. He's nearly dressed. Please take a seat, Miss.

PANSY.

Thank you. [*She sits and looks round.*

JOE.

He isn't seedy this morning, I hope?

MRS. HURST.

[*Doubtfully.*] N-o, sir, not to say seedy. Only a bit later than usual, and a trifle more hirritable perhaps, sir.

* To save time between the two acts, Pansy Dale can wear hospital dress under coat and skirt.

JOE.

He hasn't had one of his attacks since I saw him?

MRS. HURST.

No, sir, oh no. But he did talk of wanting to see you about one or two trifles, sir.

JOE.

Well, tell him I'm here, Mrs. Hurst.

PANSY.

But don't say that any one else is here, please.

MRS. HURST.

[*Looking curiously at her.*] No, Miss.

JOE.

We'll wait. [*To* PANSY.] But what about the cab, then?

PANSY.

Oh, let it wait too.

JOE.

Will your trunk be all right? Wouldn't it be better to put it in the hall and pay the cab in case we're here for some time?

PANSY.

Just as you like, dear.

JOE.

Yes. [*Giving money to* MRS. HURST.] Kindly pay the driver, Mrs. Hurst, and ask him to put the trunk just inside the front door.

MRS. HURST.

Certainly, sir. Take a seat, sir. He's sure to be down in a minute or two.

JOE.

[*Sitting by* PANSY.] All right. Thanks.
[*Exit* MRS. HURST *door centre.*

PANSY.

[*Jumping up.*] I'm frightened to death, Joe.

JOE.

[*Kissing her as the door closes.*] Nonsense, darling. He *must* melt at the sight of you. You'd captivate an iceberg, leave alone an old man.

PANSY.

But you said he was a box of fireworks—you know you did.

JOE.

I said he was the typical old uncle, and so he is—worse luck!

PANSY.

I wish you had told him about it beforehand, after all; or at least hinted at the possibility of our engagement, without exactly telling him that we *are* engaged. Just to see how he'd take it.

JOE.

I know exactly how he'd have taken it. And I know that you, the actual you, are my only argument and my only chance.

PANSY.

Oh, Joe! You only think that because you happen to—to like me. No, I *can't* face him without a word of preparation. Joe, I'm going to bolt!

JOE.

My dear little girl, he won't murder us out of hand. I believe in everything coming right if you only go the right way about it. Sit still, and trust to my eloquence and your own smile. We're going to romp in. There's only going to be one loser in this game.

PANSY.

And who's that?

JOE.

The poor old hospital that has just lost you.

PANSY.

[*Laughing.*] As if there weren't dozens of nurses ready to step into my shoes—far better nurses! No. I'm so dreadfully afraid *you're* going to be the loser, Joe—loser of all this naughty old baby's money. What *shall* we do if he gets furious and you are penniless?

JOE.

If he really cuts up rough I suppose we shall have to leave it for the present and think of fresh means later on. It's unfortunate that this isn't one of his good days. However—[*bracing himself. Cough heard off.*]

PANSY.

Joe, he's coming! I *can't* stand it. You *must* say just a few words before bursting me upon him. Oh, where can I wait? Hide me! In here? [*Opening door right.*] Dining-room. Yes. I must! Call me the moment he seems to relent. I'll do my utmost to make him like me. Oh, Joe, good luck to us both!

[*Kisses her hand to him from doorway.*

JOE.

[*Waving his hand and laughing.*] You little coward! [*She shuts the door behind her quickly.*] Iron-nerved in the operating-room, and shaking in her shoes at a thing like this. The eternal incomprehensible.

Enter FREEMANTLE, *door left. He is a gouty old gentleman of about sixty. Velveteen coat, slippers, thick stick, etc.*

FREEMANTLE.

[*Smileless.*] Well, Joe?

JOE.

Morning, Uncle. How's the foot?

FREEMANTLE.

Oh, getting steadily worse, as usual. Good thing you happened to look in. That last bottle of rot does more harm than good. What in thunder is it?

[*Lets himself down painfully on couch.*

JOE.

Oh, I can show you the prescription if you like. I'm sorry to find you're not feeling so well.

FREEMANTLE.

What did you come in for if you didn't expect to be wanted? Think I like to sit and look at you?

JOE.

Well, to tell the truth, Uncle, I came to speak about myself, this morning, for I've——

FREEMANTLE.

What, *you* ill?

JOE.

No, no.

FREEMANTLE.

Ah, want some money. Been playing bridge. *I* know.

JOE.

No, Uncle, I've been playing a different game.

FREEMANTLE.

Well, well, come to the point. Don't sit there riddling me with riddles. What's the trouble? Out with it. And then we can get to this business.

[*Indicating his foot.*

JOE.

[*Very cheerfully.*] Well, to-day's my twenty-fifth birthday you know, Uncle——

FREEMANTLE.

And you thought I'd better be reminded of it? Umph.

JOE.

[*Biting his lip.*] And I thought *I'd* give *you* a present this time. You shall guess what it is.

FREEMANTLE.

None of your riddles, I told you. Out with it!

JOE.

Well, how would you like to add a niece to your possessions?

FREEMANTLE.

[*Sitting up.*] What's this?

JOE.

My future wife would be your future niece, you see, Uncle. A doctor ought to settle down young, you know.

FREEMANTLE.

[*With smouldering rage.*] Ah! Quite so! A boy of twenty-five, earning twopence a year by the skin of his teeth, ought to marry and have a large family. Quite so. Precisely. Go on.

JOE.

Of course I am very deeply attached to the young girl whose love I was proud and happy enough to——

FREEMANTLE.

Now look here, young man. There's only one thing in this world that can justify a youth of your position in contemplating matrimony. If you have chosen a young woman of ample means——

JOE.

I'm sorry, but she has so far worked for her livelihood.

FREEMANTLE.

Ah! The lodging-house slavey! The old story! Capital! First rate!

JOE.

[*Controlling himself.*] No—not the lodging-house slavey. She is as well born as you or I. She went in for hospital training as much for love of it as from necessity.

FREEMANTLE.

Quite so. All right, my boy, I'm to see you tie yourself to a mill-stone in the shape of a plotting, scheming hospital nurse, and to give you my blessing backed with cheques. Quite so! Capital! Just what I wanted. Just what I hoped for when I spent money on your education, and risked my own health in order to give you a lift in your practice. Ha, ha! You've hit it off this time, my boy. But make no

mistake. The day you go and do for yourself by marrying a penniless poultice-monger, you *do* do for yourself, for I cut you off with a penny, and don't say I left you in any doubt about it, for I don't. You understand?

JOE.

[*Quietly.*] Perfectly. But I am going to ask one favour of you, Uncle, all the same.

FREEMANTLE.

A year's trial. The old game. *I* know, *I* know.

JOE.

Simply that I may bring her here, and——

FREEMANTLE.

You may *not!* Do you think I'm a fool?—that if her teeth happen to be straight and her hair curls I shall say, "Not so bad, my boy. Take her, and my blessing with her?" It's the *principle* I'm fighting. If you must marry at all, you can marry a *lady*, as other gentlemen have done before you. None of your white ham-frills for me. [*Indicating a cap.*] Let her stop among her bottles. Good Lord, why haven't you the sense, man, to follow the example I have given you? Live a free life and a peaceful

without any silly petticoats to hamper you. I've kept clear of 'em, thank Heaven, thank Heaven!

JOE.

And if I decide to sacrifice—er—all worldly considerations, and fight my own way to this marriage——

FREEMANTLE.

Ah, if you defy me? eh? That's right, my boy. Capital! Famous! Snap your fingers at me. That's it. [*Working himself up.*] My own brother's only boy. Throws my money in my face, and goes to the Devil. Walter's boy. That's how they do it nowadays. Down with the old generation! Ungrateful scoundrel, that's what you are [*standing up*]. Get out of this, and stay out of it till you've come to your senses. Don't stand there roaring at me, or, by James, I'll—[*He staggers towards the door.*] Yes, I'll fetch it, and you shall see it burn—my will. [*Clutches at his necktie.*] Wait there and see me burn it—before your eyes—unless you give me your word—[JOE *shakes his head.*] Ah, you wait there. [*He staggers out at door left and bangs it after him, calling* MRS. HURST! MRS. HURST! *without.*]

JOE.

[*Throwing open door right.*] Pansy, it's all up. Hopeless! Did you hear?

Enter PANSY.

PANSY.

How could I help hearing? It was awful!

JOE.

He's gone to fetch his will. I'm to have the treat of seeing it burn!

PANSY.

Oh, no! You *must* give in to him now. You must, for my sake, as well as your own. He'll come round some day. Don't let him do anything desperate and final! Call him back and say——

JOE.

Am I to have my life wrecked by a frenzied old buffalo? Not I!

PANSY.

But if it's only a matter of waiting a little, let us be patient. Perhaps when he's thought it all over he'll see it in a different light. Perhaps——

JOE.

It's all very well. But what's going to induce him to change his mind? Nothing, if he won't even see you. He doesn't play the game. No, it's infernal

tyranny; that's what it is. And I've more than half a mind——

Enter MRS. HURST *hurriedly, door left.*

MRS. HURST.

Oh, Mr. Joe, Sir, thank goodness you're 'ere. He's had an attack. There 'e lies, and 'is face the colour——

JOE.

Where is he?

PANSY.

[*Simultaneously.*] Oh dear, oh dear!

MRS. HURST.

[*Indicating door left.*] In there, Sir. Must have dropped down by the desk.

JOE.

[*To* PANSY.] Wait here. Don't be alarmed. It's nothing unusual. [*To* MRS. HURST.] You'll stay with Miss Dale till I call you.

MRS. HURST.

Yes, Sir, I'll be 'ere. [*Exit* JOE, *door left.*

PANSY.

Oh, Mrs. Hurst, does he often have these attacks?

MRS. HURST.

If anythink upsets 'im, Miss, or over-fatigues 'im, 'e's as likely as not to fall down and lay there like a log, all in a second.

PANSY.

Dear me, it *is* dangerous at his age.

MRS. HURST.

Perhaps Mr. Joe alarmed 'im somehow about 'is poor foot.

PANSY.

Oh, no, he wouldn't do that. Do the attacks last long?

MRS. HURST.

Well, not to say long, Miss, but 'e generally wants a good bit o' extra nursin' for some time after, and I'm not gettin' no younger than I used to be. It's the night nursin' comes 'eavy on me nowadays. That's where it is. And this cough don't make me feel no livelier.

PANSY.

Isn't there some one else here who could help you?

MRS. HURST.

Oh, 'e won't 'ave Em'ly near 'im, not when 'e's laid

up. No, I shall just 'ave to do the best I can. And no one can't do no more.

Re-enter JOE, *door left.*

PANSY.

How is he?

MRS. HURST.

[*Simultaneously.*] Well, Sir?

JOE.

I've got him on to the sofa. He soon came round. [*To* PANSY.] It's no good your waiting, dear. [*To* MRS. HURST.] Will you go and see to him, Mrs. Hurst, till I've seen Miss Dale off? I'll be back directly. Don't let him move if you can help it.

MRS. HURST.

No, Sir, I know. [*Exit left.*

PANSY.

[*Fastening her cloak.*] Isn't this unfortunate and —miserable?

JOE.

Just my luck. Never mind, little girl; are you going to help me?

PANSY.

Of course I am.

JOE.

Then go straight to the hospital, and see that they send me a good nurse with a perfect temper. Perhaps you know of one who would suit the case. Old Mrs. Hurst is a brick, but she can't do day and night nursing, especially with that cough of hers. Irritate him into another fit. It's nearly all temper, you know.

PANSY.

Joe, I've got an idea. Oh, don't say no. Let *me* nurse him!

JOE.

My dear girl, considering what brought all this on——

PANSY.

Of course, it wouldn't do if he knew it was me, but he won't. You didn't tell him my name?

JOE.

He never even let me get as far as that.

PANSY.

Then listen. You needn't tell him anything but this—that you found he positively required a professional nurse to relieve Mrs. Hurst, that you sent to the nearest hospital and procured me.

JOE.

I daren't do it. Supposing he finds out?

PANSY.

If he likes me, his finding out won't matter. If he doesn't like me—well, I must run away before he *can* find out.

JOE.

[*Derisively.*] If he doesn't like you—! But Mrs. Hurst—she knows that we came together.

PANSY.

Leave Mrs. Hurst to me. I see my way there quite clearly. She's a dear.

JOE.

But your things—the nurse would come in a hospital dress.

PANSY.

And haven't I got all my things in that box in the hall? Now that shows you. I was sent by Providence. Don't dare to frustrate me. I suppose there' a spare room here?

JOE.

Lord, yes, several.

PANSY.

Then have the trunk put in *all* of them!—and wait till I've changed. Will you do it?

JOE.

[*Holding out his hand.*] Pansy, you're the pluckiest girl in Great Britain. Actually *nursing* the lion in his den. Well, it's neck or nothing.

PANSY.

[*Laughing.*] It shall be neck.

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

[*The same room. A month has elapsed.* FREEMANTLE *is sitting in an armchair by the open window, in dressing-gown and slippers. Small table with bottles and glasses beside him.* PANSY, *in hospital dress, cap, &c., is reading out from a newspaper.*]

FREEMANTLE.

[*In mild tones.*] There, that'll do, my dear. That's dull stuff to your mind, eh?

PANSY.

[*Teasingly.*] You mean it's wasted on my dull mind. Shan't I just finish this column?

FREEMANTLE.

No, no, column be blowed. I can finish that by myself. What's the time?

PANSY.

It's nearly twelve.

FREEMANTLE.

Umph! Master Joe will be here directly.

suppose he thinks he's made a neat job of me this time. I've still to tell him what *I* think on that subject.

PANSY.

You don't think he's done badly, surely. Why, you said yourself that you'd never recovered so quickly before.

FREEMANTLE.

What I think is that there's precious little use in having a good doctor—and I don't say he *is* one, mind you—without a good nurse. It's the nursing that tells.

PANSY.

It's the two together, Mr. Freemantle.

FREEMANTLE.

Don't argue with me. I say it's the nursing. An incompetent, ugly, hard-voiced, amateur nurse will throw a patient back to any extent. Now I say every woman ought to wear a cap like that in the sick room. It's neat, it's practical, it's amazingly pretty.

PANSY.

[*Laughing.*] I hope you don't think that it was for the cap that I took up hospital work.

FREEMANTLE.

Shouldn't think any the worse of you, my dear, if it had been.

PANSY.

Well, it wasn't. I love the work.

FREEMANTLE.

Most extraordinary! There's only one thing that I wouldn't prefer to being a nurse.

PANSY.

And that's being a patient?

FREEMANTLE.

You've hit it, and I'm dashed if I'm going to be a patient much longer.

PANSY.

Of course you shan't. [*Bell rings.*] Oh, there's the bell. [*Looks out of window.*] It's the doctor. [*She straightens cap, etc., before glass at the back.*] Shall I fetch him in?

FREEMANTLE.

No, my dear; he'll fetch himself in soon enough.

PANSY.

[*Disappointed, and placing chair for him.*] I'm sure

he'll be very pleased with you to-day. I've never seen you look better in all these four weeks. Perhaps he'll allow you to drive out if it keeps fine.

FREEMANTLE.

Shan't ask him. These doctors get to think altogether too much of their opinions. Suppose I know as well as any one whether I'm fit to drive out or not.

PANSY.

Ah, now you're getting naughty.

FREEMANTLE.

[*Laughing.*] All right, little ogress. But I'm not the old roarer I was, eh?

Enter JOE, *right. He kisses* PANSY *hurriedly behind* FREEMANTLE.

FREEMANTLE.

Ah, here you are. Talk of the devil——

JOE.

[*Shaking hands with him.*] Well, and how are you this fine morning, Uncle?

FREEMANTLE.

But for you I'd be enjoying this fine morning like any other Christian—driving out, getting a little air.

But I suppose you've got to assert your twopenny-ha'penny authority—eh?

JOE.

I've come on purpose to advise a drive before luncheon. First a small glass of champagne with a biscuit—you won't mind that?

FREEMANTLE.

[*With a twinkle.*] I'll get it down somehow.

JOE.

And then an hour's drive in the Park.

FREEMANTLE.

Nurse, here you are. [*Hands her his keys.*] Find Mrs. Hurst and tell her to give you a bottle of *my* champagne—see? and to 'phone to Kirkby for his best victoria, to come round at once. None of his old wheelbarrows—the best victoria.

PANSY.

Now we can *really* feel that we are getting on.

[*Exit laughing, right.*

JOE.

[*Picking up medicine bottle.*] I think you might discontinue this now, Uncle. We've got past this.

FREEMANTLE.

I'm going to chuck the lot of 'em, my boy; it's a marvel I've survived all that rat-poison. I'm not what you call "a case" any longer, and I'm going to be my own master again. No more invalidism.

JOE.

Quite right. You mean you won't require the nurse any longer, and all that?

FREEMANTLE.

I didn't say that. Mrs. Hurst won't want to take on any more work, so I can't do without the nurse just yet.

JOE.

You still find her—er—satisfactory?

FREEMANTLE.

Satisfactory? My dear boy, she's the best nurse and the best woman out. She's shed a new light, and a jolly becoming one, I can tell you, on the whole sex. I'm only sorry to have waited so long before finding out that there *are* such women. And where your eyes are, all you young whipper-snappers, I don't know. By George, if I weren't an old crock——

JOE.

You'd still be a gentleman, and never think of her, of course, as anything but a poultice-monger.

FREEMANTLE.

Ah, there are nurses and nurses, my boy. Yes, if I weren't an old crock——

JOE.

You'd still remember that she represents a petticoat—hampering things, petticoats, you know—and that it's best to lead a free life and a peaceful, like me.

Re-enter PANSY, *door left, with champagne and glass on tray.*

PANSY.

Here it is, and you're to uncork it, please, doctor. Mrs. Hurst is afraid of it.

JOE.

[*Taking it.*] With pleasure.

FREEMANTLE.

That's right. Come along, come along. The right thing in the right place, for once.

JOE *stands behind* FREEMANTLE, *uncorking champagne and making violent signs to* PANSY.

JOE.

[*In a whisper.*] Now's the time. Shall I?

PANSY.

[*Holding the glass and whispering.*] Shall we? Can you? All right. Do.

He pours out champagne. She hands it to FREEMANTLE *with one hand.* JOE *holds the other.* FREEMANTLE *takes a sip.*

JOE.

Take a little more, Uncle. [*He does so.*] I want you to guess something and spare me a confession. I made one a month ago on this very spot and it was not a success.

FREEMANTLE.

What's this? A confession? [*He sees their hands linked.*] What the—Joe—you're——

JOE.

[*Drawing her towards him.*] Yes, Uncle, I am. I told you all about it then, and you refused point-blank to make her acquaintance. She was here, in the next room, waiting for you to relent, and you know what happened. She had come as a prospective niece; she stayed as a nurse.

PANSY.

Can you forgive me?

JOE.

It was her only chance of an introduction, Uncle.

PANSY.

[*Kneeling at his knees.*] It was I who begged him to let me do it. Oh, please, *please*, don't be angry this time.

FREEMANTLE.

[*Wiping his forehead.*] Phew! I'll take a little more of that champagne, if you please.

JOE.

You see, Uncle, some of the whipper-snappers aren't as blind as they look.

PANSY.

[*Handing him the glass.*] Am I ever to be forgiven?

FREEMANTLE.

[*Patting her hand.*] I must think a bit, my dear.

JOE.

Harder to forgive me, I'm afraid, isn't it, Uncle?

FREEMANTLE.

Give me time, give me time. Ah, Joe, my boy, you may be nothing of a doctor, but you have cured an old man's folly—just in time. [*To* PANSY.] And you've cured a rotten bad temper, my dear. Where's that champagne? Fill two more glasses, nurse—I mean Pansy.

PANSY.

[*Doing so.*] I will, Uncle.

JOE.

[*Raising his glass.*] Uncle, to you with all my heart!

PANSY.

[*Raising hers.*] And mine.

FREEMANTLE.

Bless you. [*Choking a little, but with dignity.* And thank you both—very much.

CURTAIN.

MRS. GUTHERIDGE

DRAMATIS PERSONA

MRS. GUTHERIDGE.

SCENE: *A miserably furnished room in a workman's flat. Deal table with broken and propped leg in centre. Two broken chairs and a stool. A mattress of sorts on the ground. Door left. Practicable window, right. An infant of about five or six months lies asleep on the mattress, wrapped in an old shawl.*

MRS. GUTHERIDGE

Curtain rises on MRS. GUTHERIDGE *standing at open door with a cardboard box in one hand and a small leather bag in the other. She calls through door:*

Yes, thet's all right, Mr. Flunkey. I'll 'ave 'er ready by four. Trust me! And mind yer don't fetch yer nose up agin' the top o' the door down there. So long! [*Bangs door to with her foot.*] Lord, what a caution! If the masters was as proud as the servants, well—there *would* be a set-out. [*Imitating the flunkey manner.*] 'Er lidyship is pleased to 'ear that you will part with the hinfant for thirty pounds, which she sends it in solid gold [*holding out small bag*], and 'opes you will 'ave 'er dressed an' ready in these 'ere things by four [*holding out box*], when she's comin' 'erself in the motah to fetch it awye. [*Putting box and bag on table and laughing.*] 'E's a dyesey, 'e is! "Won't yer tike the biby yerself?" I says. "Yer'd like to carry 'er down to the West End, *I* know," says I. "None o' your lip," says 'e. Laugh! I should think I did.

But there. I mustn't wiste me time. It's gorn the quarter to; I 'eard it strike. [*She goes over to baby on bed.*] Wish yer'd wike up, my precious. We've got to mike a reg'lar toff o' you with them there things. [*Indicating box.*] Queen o' Sheba won't be in it when yer goes driving orf in that motor. I'll *'ave* to wike yer presently, my young corker. But there! [*Deep sigh.*] I'll leave yer till the lawst. May as well 'ave a look at the chink and see if Mr. Flunkey 'as brought it fair an' square. [*Pouring the money out on the table and lettingit run through her fingers.*] Lor'! Did ever you see such a sight! Soverings! Golden soverings! [*Counting.*] Ten, twenty, thirty of 'em, an' all me own—*mine!* To think I should live to see such a thing! I shan't know meself when I've done a bit of shoppin'. Won't we 'ave a dinner? Not 'arf. Beef—roast beef—that's what we'll 'ave, and plenty of it. 'Odges'll cook it for me. An' bicon for breakfast, an' a pink dress for Gladys if I knows anythink abart it, an' a tweed suit for Bobby, an' boots, an' a jacket—I'll 'ave a warm jacket at larst or know the reason why. An' we'll 'ave a piece of fancy soap—*two* pieces! An' I shouldn't wonder but what I took in the *Dyely Mile* an' set a-readin' of it in the winder where *hany one* can see me as they parses along. An' I shall git some furniture too, blest if I don't! Bedsteads with knobs on 'em, and a carpet—we'll 'ave a carpet, o'

course. An' I don't sye as I won't 'ave a curting up to that winder, and a horniment or two on the mantelshelf. We ain't agoin' to 'ave no stintin' this journey. [*With sudden depression.*] Wish my poor man could 'a' lived to see it! 'E always did fancy the *Dyely Mile*—and bicon—and I could 'a'got 'im a collar—but there, if 'e *'ad* 'a lived I never should 'a met the lidy at the 'Orsepital, an' she'd never 'ave took no fancy to my little 'un. [*Looking at it again.*] An' no wonder she *did* tike a fancy! If ever there was a little ingel it's you, that it is. An' when are you goin' to wike up an' sye good-bye to yer mother, eh? Time's gittin' on. [*Becoming agitated.*] I'll put everythink 'andy, so as it won't tike long. [*Bustles about as she talks, getting broken basin, water, etc., together.*] Dear Lord, I do *'ite* to wike 'er. S'posin' she cries? But there, [*to the baby*] if you do, it's only because yer don't understand, o' course. You don't know what a loverly time y'ere goin' to 'ave. Never no more cryin' for milk what ain't there. Buckets of it always ready for yer. An' no more cold in the nights, but a swell nurse to wheel yer out in a beautiful pram with the best on 'em. An' a pink sating bed to sleep in—shouldn't I love to see yer in it too! [*Wistfully.*] They *might* 'a said I could come just onst a year. What 'arm could it do? I wouldn't nab yer, if *that's* what they're afeard of. An' it'd just mike all the difference! But there, it's

no good thinkin' any more o' that. That's all settled an' done with. Let's 'ave a look at the trewso. [*Undoes and opens cardboard box on table.*] Lord, there's a bonnet! Won't yer look somethink like in that, with yer pretty little fice, an' yer blue eyes an' all. An' my stars! 'ere's a cloak! Silk! Silk both sides! Ain't it loverly? Cost more than one and eleven-three, *that* did! Run into solid gold, as sure as my name's Emma Gutheridge. She *will* look a little Duchess in that, and—'ark!—thought I 'eard a motor. Wish I'd got a clock in 'ere. Shouldn't break me 'art if that bloomin' motor was to fetch up agin a lamp-post an' git chawed up a bit. Yes, I would, too. It'd only mean a few hours extry with the little 'un, an' worts the good o' that? Oh Lord, that *is* 'er. [*Rushes to the window.*] No. 'Tain't nothink at all. I keeps earin' of it in me 'ead, that's wort it is. Wish I 'adn't sent them childring out. It would 'a been some one to speak to, 'stead o' sittin' ere 'earin' motors as ain't there, an' church clocks as ain't strikin', an gettin' the fidgets all over yer, sime as if yer was a'witin for yer own funeral. [*Church clock heard striking.*] There! There it goes! One. Two. Three. Four. She's goin' to be lite—Thank the Lord! P'raps that there motor's been an' gone an' done a caper after all. They mostly does, I've 'eard tell. Hawful set-outs with them foreign drivers. [*Motor-horn heard outside.*] There! [*Flies to window.*] That

is 'er this time. I knew it was! I *knew* it was! [*Panting.*] An' I 'aven't got yer ready! Oh, Lord 'elp us! What *shall* I do? [*Picking up child.*] I *must* pick yer up now, my loverly, my beauty. [*Kisses her wildly.*] They've come to fetch yer awye to be a lill' lyedy. Come an' look at yer new mother, [*carries the baby to window*] with 'er 'at full of feathers as long as a cow's tail. There, look'ee. There's a loverly carriage! An' she's a gittin' out. She's a comin' up 'ere to fetch yer awye—for good—for good—I shan't niver see yer agine, my little 'un—she's comin' up to fetch yer. [*With sudden passion.*] No she ain't. She shan't neither, s'long as I can stand up an' fight for yer! 'Ere! [*Dashes to table and picks up a handful of gold.*] I'm not a goin' to sell yer, my loverly—not for all the gold in London. [*Throwing up window.*] Yer've only one mother an' that's me—me! [*Calling out wildly.*] Don't you come up 'ere—not another step—I'm not a goin' to part with 'er—not if you offers me Buckin'am Pallis—ere—tike yer money! [*Hurls it out.*] Tike the 'ole bloomin' lot! [*Rushing from table to window and back again and laughing hysterically.*] 'Ere yer are—'ere's a Lord Mayor's show! An' 'ere's the trewso. [*Throws out bonnet and cloak.*] Tike it awye an' don't you dare come up 'ere. [*Rushes to door and locks it.*] I've got yer sife my loverly, my precious. *She staggers to front of stage with the child pressed*

tightly against her breast.] You're *mine*, an' I'll never part with yer—not if we starves together—s'welp me Gord! I've got yer—I've got yer—I've got yer! [*Bursts into sobs as she falls on her knees.*]

CURTAIN.

'WARE WIRE

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

EDMUND WARD.	JACK WETHERTON.
GWENDOLEN, *his wife.*	LAURA HILL.
MONTAGUE SHELLOP.	BARNETT, *a maid.*

SCENE: MRS. WARD'S *drawing-room in Chelsea. A prettily furnished room with doors right and left, fire in grate.*

TIME: *A winter morning.*

'WARE WIRE

GWENDOLEN WARD *is discovered standing before the glass over the fire-place, pinning a bunch of roses in her dress. She is a pretty woman of about twenty-five, smartly dressed.*

GWENDOLEN.

[*After trying various positions for the roses.*] M-m-m, yes. I think that's the right spot. Too sweet of Jack to have sent them, and just like him.

Enter BARNETT *door right.*

BARNETT.

Please, ma'am, can I have another serviette out?

GWENDOLEN.

Oh yes, Barnett, here's the key. Have the oysters come?

BARNETT.

Yes, ma'am.

GWENDOLEN.

I've been down to see the table. It looks very nice, Barnett.

BARNETT.

Thank you, ma'am.

Enter WARD *door left.*

GWENDOLEN.

All right, Barnett. [*Exit* BARNETT.

GWENDOLEN.

Oh, Ted, I'm so glad you've got off early. Who do you think's coming to lunch?

WARD.

I *know*. Shellop, of course. Think I'd forgotten?

GWENDOLEN.

No, he's just *not* coming. Try again.

WARD.

[*Going to hearthrug.*] My dear child, I'm too old and too cold for riddles. I know it was to-day that Shellop was to lunch here.

GWENDOLEN.

Yes, clever—was to, but I've put him off.

WARD.

[*Amazed.*] What?

GWENDOLEN.

And Jack's coming instead—Jack Wetherton—fact! He's back from Egypt and at the Carlton. [*Takes a telegram from desk.*] Look. [*Reads.*] "Arrived last night. Off to Darnwater to-morrow. Expect me lunch to-day.—JACK." And then he sent me these adorable flowers.

WARD.

Jack! By Jove, that *is* news. Good old Jack. But still, Shellop——

GWENDOLEN.

Never mind Shellop, he can come any other day. I've wired to Jack: "Delighted. Three thousand cheers." But of course it was impossible to let him meet Shellop here. You remember how he detested him.

WARD.

[*Annoyed.*] Shellop is a poor harmless bounder who means well and does nobody any harm, and who happens to have it in his power to do me a very good turn just now.

GWENDOLEN.

In business?

WARD.

Precisely. It wasn't right to put him off. What did you say to the man?

GWENDOLEN.

Oh, just "Unavoidably obliged to postpone luncheon. So sorry. Am writing."

WARD.

What time did you send that?

GWENDOLEN.

Oh, er, about eleven or half-past. I thought I'd write a nice letter to-night, you know, and say, er—er——

WARD.

It was horribly risky. He particularly wanted to see me here on business to-day, and—well, if he gets wind of this it may probably cost me a matter of three thousand or so.

GWENDOLEN.

But he *won't* get wind of it. We can tell both Jack and Laura never to breathe a word——

WARD.

Laura? Is she coming?

GWENDOLEN.

Yes. You don't let me finish telling you. That was another reason for putting off Shellop. You know he continues to propose to Laura more or less at intervals of about a fortnight. And she hates him even more violently than poor Jack did.

WARD.

But why have her here to-day?

GWENDOLEN.

Because I promised myself that mine should be the fun and the glory of bringing those two together again —Jack and Lolo—and at the first opportunity, too. I'm going to pull off that match this winter, or die in the effort.

WARD.

Another risky game.

GWENDOLEN.

Risky? How *can* you, when you know they're made for each other, and now that Jack's rich——

WARD.

Well, surely there was time enough for all that later on.

GWENDOLEN.

My dear, Jack goes down to Darnwater to-morrow, and once his own silly snobbish people get hold of him——. No, I wired to Lolo, and told her she simply *must* lunch here to-day because I'd got a surprise for her.

WARD.

And she's coming? Then we're four. But you seem to have spent the whole of your morning and half my income in wiring.

GWENDOLEN.

I had to, dear. And, do you know, I couldn't remember Shellop's address at first. I had to send all three telegrams at once, and I got so mad and so flurried, with the telegraph boy waiting all the time, that I hardly knew what I was saying or to whom. However, it's all right now, and we're going to be a charming little *partie carrée*.

WARD.

Well, I hope so. I suppose I must go down to the cellar——

Enter BARNETT, *door right*.

BARNETT.

[*Announcing.*] Mr. Wetherton.

Enter JACK, *a good-looking man of about thirty, in a frock-coat. He looks tanned and genial.*

WARD.

Ah, Jack, welcome home!

GWENDOLEN.

How are you, dear Jack? This *is* nice!

JACK.

Well, I am jolly pleased to see you!

[*They shake hands warmly.*]

GWENDOLEN.

Look at your roses, Jack. I was *so* enchanted! I've been longing to say thank you.

JACK.

Thought I remembered your weakness for vegetables. Hope they were all right.

WARD.

[*With his hands on* JACK'S *shoulders.*] Let's have a look at you, old man.

JACK.

You haven't changed a bit, either of you.

GWENDOLEN.

You're browner and a little thinner.

JACK.

And a lot wiser, I can tell you.

WARD.

You arrived last night?

JACK.

Yes, fit as a fly.

GWENDOLEN.

Inspired of you to send that wire, Jack. Did you laugh at my hysterical answer?

JACK.

Didn't I. 'Fraid I rose to it rather too promptly. I'm shocking early, but I couldn't help it. I had to go first to——

WARD.

Good heavens, man, don't begin to be polite.

GWENDOLEN.

I'm so *glad* you came early. We can have a few words before the others come.

JACK.

The others? I say, this isn't a party, is it

WARD.

Lord, no, not a party—

GWENDOLEN.

As a matter of fact there'll only be one more, an old friend of yours, whom I've asked as a great surprise for you.

Enter BARNETT, *door right.*

BARNETT.

[*Announcing.*] Mr. Shellop.

Enter SHELLOP, *a man of about forty, slight Cockney accent and the wrong clothes. The* WARDS *exchange looks of agony;* GWENDOLEN *suppresses a scream.*

SHELLOP.

[*Shaking hands heartily.*] Good morning, Mrs. Edmund. How do, Ward? [*They mutter incoherently.*] Hello, Mr. Wetherton, *you* back again?

JACK.

[*Stiffly civil.*] I got back last night.

SHELLOP.

Looks quite the Eastern, Mrs. Teddy, don't 'e, with that complexion.

GWENDOLEN.

Y—yes. Oh, yes. Won't you sit down?

SHELLOP.

Thanks. 'Fraid I'm a bit early, but the fact is I've come straight here from Paddington Station. Been week-endin' at Maiden'ead and hadn't time to go home first. Missed my train, as a matter of fact. So I've taken the liberty of depositin' my bag in your 'all.

WARD.

Oh, that's all right.

GWENDOLEN.

Oh, of course.

SHELLOP.

Bit of an eyesore, but my man's going to fetch it away presently. I wired him to come for it, as I've got several things to do in the West End before I go 'ome, and I shan't have time to come back ere for it.

GWENDOLEN.

I hope you had a good time on the river?

SHELLOP.

Ripping time, Mrs. Teddy. It must be a pretty flat house-party if *I* can't enjoy myself at it. Lots of pretty girls. One of the men was a bit of a bounder, but——

JACK.

'Must have tried you rather severely, that

SHELLOP.

Oh, I sat on his head all right—made some lovely scores. I must tell you all about it at lunch. [*To* JACK.] Let me see, how long have you been away Wetherton?

JACK.

Close on seven months.

SHELLOP.

Ah! you've made rather a longer week-end of it, eh? Caught any crocodiles? [*Laughs heartily.*]

GWENDOLEN.

[*Who has been making violent signs to* WARD *to take* SHELLOP *away. In a whisper.*] Take him anywhere Into your den. I *must* explain to Jack.

WARD.

Come and have a smoke in my den, Shellop. Plenty time before luncheon. [*To* JACK.] You'll play with Gwendolen for a few minutes, Jack?

JACK.

Delighted.

SHELLOP.

[*To* WARD.] Right you are. I wanted a few words with you in your business ear, and I could do with a cigarette. By Jove, this cold weather don't make you

half peckish. I hope this is a punctual house, Mrs. Teddy.

GWENDOLEN.

Luncheon will soon be ready.

SHELLOP.

That's just as well. Don't want to do any cannibalism on your 'usband if I can 'elp it. [*Roars with laughter.*]

Exit WARD *and* SHELLOP, *left.*

GWENDOLEN.

[*Dropping on to chair.*] Jack, I'm in despair!

JACK.

Not really? What's up?

GWENDOLEN.

I'm *furious* that you should meet that horror here to-day. [*Jumping up.*] Imagine what's happened. I wired to put him off the moment I knew you were coming, and—you heard—he's driven here straight from the station. So *like* him!

JACK.

Oh, I can bear him, if that's all.

GWENDOLEN.

But that *isn't* all—tho' it's bad enough! Don't you see—he'll find my wire waiting for him when he goes home!

JACK.

[*With a long whistle.*] That's awkward. What did you wire?

GWENDOLEN.

"Luncheon unavoidably postponed." And I wish I'd died first.

JACK.

Well, he certainly mustn't see that wire. You've got to send for it as soon as you can, that's all.

GWENDOLEN.

But you heard what he said, the wretch; that he's ordered his man to fetch his bag from here, and I'm in agonies in case the man brings my wire with him.

JACK.

[*Pacing.*] Lord! Wait a bit. Well, if he doesn't bring it, you're all right for the present; but in case he does, you'd better tell your maid that Shellop's man is coming, and that if he brings a wire with him she's to give it to you in here.

GWENDOLEN.

Jack, you're a genius! What it is to be an engineer! I suppose you can engineer *anything*. [*Rings.*] Of course that's the thing to do. But—oh, dear! Wait— Supposing the wire comes when we're at lunch?

JACK.

In that case your maid is to keep it back for you till after lunch.

GWENDOLEN.

Splendid! You're a wasted diplomatist. I can't thank you enough, Jack. Teddy's so particularly anxious not to offend the brute just now. That's why I have to endure him. Doesn't it seem degrading? But that he should be here just to-day——

Enter BARNETT, *right.*

GWENDOLEN.

Oh, Barnett, Mr. Shellop's man is coming to fetch his luggage. If he brings a wire with him, please bring it straight in here *to me*, or, if it comes at lunch-time, put it in my room, please. You quite understand?

BARNETT.

Quite, ma'am.

GWENDOLEN.

That's all, Barnett. [*Exit* BARNETT, *right.*

JACK.

Now I hope you feel happier.

GWENDOLEN.

I think we've done the only thing that *can* be done to save the situation. Of course nothing could console me for having Shellop here to-day, but I *have* got a little consolation for *you*.

JACK.

I'm sure I don't require it, but what is it?

GWENDOLEN.

I'm not going to tell you. At least, I'll tell you that the consolation will take the form of another guest who will be here directly. But I won't tell you who it is.

JACK.

Not old Spiffles?

GWENDOLEN.

[*Laughing.*] No, nothing in the least like old Spiffles. Now you're not to guess, else I shall begin telling fibs.

JACK.

This is very mysterious.

Enter BARNETT, *right, with telegram on salver.*

GWENDOLEN.

Oh, joy, here it is! [*Snatches it eagerly.*

BARNETT.

Mr. Shellop's man had just been, ma'am. He says this telegram came early this morning, and he'd have brought it sooner only he had to go first to the vet's about Mr. Shellop's bull-dog, because——

GWENDOLEN.

Yes, yes. All right, Barnett.

[*Exit* BARNETT, *voices heard approaching*

GWENDOLEN.

[*To* JACK.] I hear Mr. Shellop. What shall we do with it?

JACK.

The fire?

GWENDOLEN.

[*Burning it.*] In it goes! Oh, Jack, saved! What a relief!

JACK.

Only just in time. There's the man driving off with the bag in a hansom.

Enter SHELLOP *left, with a cigarette.* GWENDOLEN *turns, and assumes a look of extreme innocence.*

SHELLOP.

Excuse my interruptin' an interesting *tête-à-tête*, Mrs. Teddy, but Edmund Ward Esq. desires me to make so bold as to request the pleasure of Jack Wetherton Esq.'s company in 'is den for five seconds to witness 'is signature to a trifling document, if 'e may so far trouble 'im.

JACK.

Oh, certainly. Witness anything he likes—[*to* GWENDOLEN]—if I may?

GWENDOLEN.

Oh, do. So nice and trusting of you.

[*Exit* JACK, *left.*

SHELLOP.

[*Following him, but turning at door.*] And I just wanted to mention, Mrs. Teddy, I'm expecting an important wire to reach my rooms this morning. I wired from Maidenhead to my man to bring it along when he comes for the bag; if you'll kindly see that it's brought in to me at once——

GWENDOLEN.

I—oh yes, of course I will.

SHELLOP.

Happens to be rather important. Thanks awfully. Ta ta. [*Exit left.*

GWENDOLEN.

[*Groaning.*] What *have* I done! Destroyed the wrong wire! The important wire that he was expecting! Oh, ass that I am! If I had thought for a moment, I would have realised that my wire couldn't have reached him early. Barnett *did* say something about this one having come early, and I was too flustered to listen to her. Oh, what *shall* I do? Can it be felonious? Can it be criminal? Is it the sort of thing one can be summonsed for? Dear goodness, if I could only get at Ted for a moment! I *must* tell him. How can I sit through luncheon with this horror on my mind? And if this wasn't my cursed wire, mine is still sitting there at his rooms, waiting for him, of course. Oh, how awful! *How* can I get at Ted?

Enter BARNETT, *right.*

BARNETT.

[*Announcing.*] Miss Hill.

Enter LAURA, *right, a pretty girl about twenty-five. Exit* BARNETT.

GWENDOLEN.

[*Falling on* LAURA'S *neck.*] Oh, Lolo!

LAURA.

What on earth is the matter?

GWENDOLEN.

Oh, how can I ever tell any one! It's the most awful thing, and so complicated that my mind——

LAURA.

But what is it? I thought it was going to be a *nice* surprise. No one ill, I do hope.

GWENDOLEN.

I'm mentally deranged for the moment, but that's nothing. The surprise *was* to have been nice, but it's all gone wrong. At least half of it's all right, but the other half's such a wretched mess——

LAURA.

Well, let's have the best half first, for goodness sake.

GWENDOLEN.

Jack Wetherton is here.

LAURA.

Don't tease. What is it really?

GWENDOLEN.

But he is, honour bright. He's here now, in Ted's

den. Only arrived from Egypt last night and is going on to Darnwater to-morrow. So it had to be now or—Heaven knows when.

LAURA.

[*Anxiously.*] But he doesn't know you wired for me? You haven't been so wicked as to give me away?——

GWENDOLEN.

Of course not. I simply told him I had a little consolation for him.

LAURA.

Consolation? What for?

GWENDOLEN.

For——Oh, that's the awful half of the surprise. I'm *too* sorry—but Montague Shellop is here too.

LAURA.

Of course you're joking.

GWENDOLEN.

Wish I were! It happened through the most dreadful muddle——

LAURA.

But I *can't* meet him. It's impossible!

GWENDOLEN.

Oh, dear girl, do bear him just this once, for my sake. After all, he's——

LAURA.

I'd bear him joyfully for your sake, any amount of times. But as rotten bad luck will have it, I've wired him that I was too seedy to go out to-day.

GWENDOLEN.

Lolo! How? Why?

LAURA.

He's got one of his horrid impromptu theatre parties on to-night, chaperoned by his impossible sister, and he wired me from Maidenhead on Sunday morning asking me to join. Of course I didn't dream of going.

GWENDOLEN.

What did you say?

LAURA.

I wired that I was laid up with a bad cold, that was all. But you quite see that I can't meet him here after that.

GWENDOLEN.

When did you wire?

LAURA.

This morning early. Yesterday was Sunday, and I was too late for the post-office.

GWENDOLEN.

Wait, wait! Oh, my poor head, it's in such a muddle. Yes! [*Embraces* LAURA *wildly.*] Yes, you've saved me. It was *your* wire that I destroyed.

LAURA.

My what?

GWENDOLEN.

It's all right! He never got it! His man brought it here for him. I thought it was mine—my wire to him—and burnt it. It's gone—burnt to ashes! [*The men's voices heard approaching.*] Here they come! Now, as you love me, say nothing about your wire Follow my cue, and I'll adore you as long as I live.

LAURA.

But I don't understand any of it. What am I to do? What am I to say?

GWENDOLEN.

Only back me up, that's all.

Enter WARD, SHELLOP, *and* JACK *left, laughing and talking.*

WARD.

[*Leading.*] Ah, Laura, I'm glad you've come.

JACK.

Miss Hill! This is a great surprise.

SHELLOP.

Why, Miss Hill, I was just thinking about you.

LAURA.

[*To* JACK.] [*After shaking hands with* WARD.] I'd no idea you were back again. [*To* SHELLOP.] How do you do? [*Glances nervously at* GWENDOLEN.]

GWENDOLEN.

[*Hysterically.*] Miss Hill knew she'd see you here this morning, Mr. Shellop, so she didn't wire to you.

LAURA.

Y—yes. I knew I was to meet you here to-day, so——

SHELLOP.

Oh, *that's* how it is! I've been wondering why I didn't get that wire.

GWENDOLEN.

And she's just been telling me how delighted she is to accept your kind invitation for to-night.

SHELLOP.

Good! Capital!

LAURA.

[*Looking furiously at* GWENDOLEN.] I—I may be able to come, if——

GWENDOLEN.

Yes, she'll come, if, of course, your sister——

SHELLOP.

Oh, my sister's coming along, you bet. She's a regular old theatre-goer, is Matilda. I've just been asking Wetherton here to join the party, but he's afraid he can't work it.

JACK.

[*Looking at* LAURA.] Oh, I may be able to manage all right. In fact, I think I may safely say yes. I'd like to come if there's room for me.

SHELLOP.

Oceans of room, my dear chap, two boxes knocked into one. And supper at the Savoy after. [*To* GWENDOLEN.] Now supposing you and Ward come along too, and make a jolly party of it, eh?

GWENDOLEN.

[*Nervously.*] It's so kind of you, but——

LAURA.

[*Aside to* GWENDOLEN.] Say yes, or I'll accept for you, and pay you out.

JACK.

Do come, Gwendolen.

GWENDOLEN.

[*Distractedly.*] I'd love to, only—it depends on other things, you see. If I may let you know before you go——

SHELLOP.

Right oh! Think it over, think it over. [*To* JACK *and* LAURA.] Now where had we better meet? [*He talks to them aside.*]

GWENDOLEN.

[*To* WARD.] How could I accept? If I don't get that wire of mine away from his rooms——

WARD.

Nice mess you've made of it.

GWENDOLEN.

Oh, *don't!* You don't know all I've been through in here.

WARD.

One of the servants had better fetch it at once.

GWENDOLEN.

They'll never give it up to a servant without Shellop's authority. Ted, *you* must fetch it, and make up some story or other.

WARD.

Me? How can I go and leave these people?

GWENDOLEN.

We must say you're obliged to go out directly after lunch.

WARD.

Thanks. It's not the kind of job I exactly thirst for.

GWENDOLEN.

Oh, Ted ——

Enter BARNETT, *with paper on salver.*

GWENDOLEN.

[*To* WARD.] Oh Lord, here it is! They've sent it on.

BARNETT *crosses stage, and hands paper to* WARD *and exit.*

WARD.

On his Majesty's service? [*Opens it hastily.*]

GWENDOLEN.

[*In a terrified whisper.*] What is it?

WARD.

It's your wire to Shellop, misdirected and returned —Not known—and it's more than you deserve.

GWENDOLEN.

[*Overcome with relief.*] Saved again! Oh, Ted, praise me!

SHELLOP.

[*Coming forward.*] I say, if you *should* be able to arrange about joining us this evening, we're going to meet at Romano's.

WARD.

I leave it to my partner.

GWENDOLEN.

Then if you really don't think we shall be too many, it's "no trumps," and we'll come with pleasure.

SHELLOP.

Good! Then that's all settled and we'll make a jolly night of it, eh?

GWENDOLEN.

And I've just decided what I want from Ted as a Christmas present.

ALL.

What's that?

GWENDOLEN.

I want dreadfully to have the telephone put in here.

WARD.

But you've always said——

GWENDOLEN.

Don't care what I said. You see, I'm not going to send another wire as long as I live.

Enter BARNETT *right.*

BARNETT.

Luncheon's served.

ALL *rise.*

CURTAIN

THE BRIDGE PARTY

DRAMATIS PERSONA

MRS. ASHDOWN.

SCENE: MRS. ASHDOWN'S *drawing-room. Two card-tables set out, with four chairs round each. Clock on mantelpiece. Telephone.*

TIME: *Entirely the present*

THE BRIDGE PARTY

A MONOLOGUE

Enter MRS. ASHDOWN *in smart afternoon gown; an open telegram in her hand. She stops with her hand on the door, and talks to an imaginary maid without.*

No, there's no answer—[*Bangs door to viciously and comes forward.*] If that isn't too provoking—at the eleventh hour! [*Reads wire.*] "Motor broken down fear impossible to reach you in time!" That's the worst of asking people from the suburbs to a really important thing like bridge. [*Scrunches up wire and flings it into fire.*] Silly women! They couldn't have come by train to make sure of the thing—oh, of course not—it must be their own horrid motor, and naturally it breaks down just when it's a matter of life and death—so to say. Dear me! My two best players! What *shall* I do? We can't be six, and have two sitting out all afternoon—half a loaf's much worse than no bread at a bridge table. Wish I had just arranged to have one table from the start—not half the strain on one's nervous system that two

tables are. And I could so easily have left out the Thomson girls—poor players as players go nowadays —and *so* homely—to put it kindly. Well—why not —what's the time now? Quarter to four. As they're only across the way I'll just—that's it—I'll just put them off—ask them for another day—and explain it all afterwards—they're so good-natured. [*Goes to speaking tube and whistles down.*] I must tell Naylor, too, that we're only four for tea, and give strict orders about keeping off other callers. Can't have stray visitors waltzing in in the middle of a rubber. One must either press them to stay and blight the game, or one must waive all the decencies and speed their departure. [*Speaking into tube.*] Oh, that you, Naylor? I want Emily to go across to No. 9 *at once*, please—Mrs. Thomson's—and say that I have no time to write a note, but that I am unavoidably obliged to ask them to come another day for bridge, instead of to-day—that I'm extremely sorry. Do you understand? [*Pause.*] That's right. Let her go at once please. And I shall only be expecting three ladies for bridge—not seven—Mrs. Ford, Mrs. Burleigh, and Mrs. Chorton. I'm not at home to any one else after four o'clock. [*Pause.*] No, I'll ring when I want tea. You'll see about Emily? That's all, thanks. [*Replaces tube.*] That's all right. Saved the situation. Now let me see—which table do I keep? That one —so this can go. [*Removing chairs and folding up*

table as she speaks.] There *are* advantages, after all, in having only one table. You don't get confused by hearing the other's polite wranglings and bitter-sweet post-mortems. There! Now none of the three need know that I ever dreamt of two tables.

We ought to have some cosy little rubbers if Mrs. Burleigh keeps her temper. I only hope I cut with her. She'd frighten either of the others into general paralysis, more especially Kitty Chorton, poor little flutterer. Luckily I'm getting used to Mrs. Burleigh. I believe bridge has strengthened my nerves. If you can play a redoubled "no trumper" with Mrs. Burleigh for a partner, and go on living when you lose it, you can do anything.

[*Telephone bell rings.*] Hullo, that'll be Gerald! "Dining at the club to-night, darling." It's enough to drive any woman to bridge.

[*Speaking into telephone with dull resignation.*] Yes. *Pause: then very brightly.*] Oh, I'm Mary Ashdown. [*Pause.*] Oh, dear Mrs. Ford, can't you really? [*Pause.*] I *am* sorry. [*Pause.*] What unutterable cheek! Just like them. They're all the same. [*Pause.*] Of *course*, I understand. [*Pause.*] No, I'm afraid I can't get any one else in the time. We shall have to play cut-throat. It's very nearly as good—if not quite. [*Pause.*] No, I'm afraid not. I believe my sister-in-law knows of a temporary, if that's any use. [*Pause.*] All right, I'll send her address

when I get it. [*Pause.*] Poor dear! I've been through it all myself. Pigs, aren't they? [*Very sweetly.*] Of *course* I forgive you. So sorry for you. You must come another time—I'll fix it up. *Good*-bye. [*Replaces receiver.*]

Too bad of her! She could perfectly well have come if she wanted to. Nothing short of sudden death can excuse a player dropping out at the last moment like this. Unpardonable. I shan't ask *her* again in a hurry. Mrs. Burleigh will be furious. She hates cut-throat; so do I, so does everybody who has any respect for the game. I wonder—I wish—if only Gerald could get away a little earlier this afternoon and take a hand. He'd be better than nothing. Can but try. [*Rings up on telephone.*] Too unfortunate that I put off the Thomson girls. That half-loaf would have come in splendidly. They could have sat out in turns. Only girls. [*Calls into telephone.*] 4370 Gerrard! [*Pause.*] Yes; if he says he won't, I can bear it; if he says he can't, I shall know it's a fib. [*At telephone.*] Hullo! that you, Gerald? You needn't put on that voice: It's me—Molly! I say, my second bridge table for this afternoon has fallen through, and now my one and only table is tottering. Mrs. Ford telephones me this minute that she can't come. Isn't it disgraceful? [*Pause.*] Oh, please, don't try to be funny. It's too bad. [*Pause.*] Oh, servant troubles as usual. [*Pause.*] No, impossible. Far too

late. But couldn't *you* get away by tea-time and take her place? [*Pause.*] Mrs. Chorton and Mrs. Burleigh. [*Pause.*] Oh, never mind, she won't kill you; and you're not allowed to use those words on the telephone, anyway. [*Pause.*] Oh, all right. I suppose we'll have to. [*Pause.*] What? [*Pause. Then snappishly.*] All right. Good-bye. [*Replaces receiver.*]

Ass that I was, not to pretend that that cat of a Forestier widow was coming. It's wonderful how "business" melts at her touch. What shall I do? Really, this sort of thing is enough to make me sign the anti-bridge pledge to-morrow, or else have all the servants taught the game, so that one can fill these awful gaps at any moment.

[*A bell rings.*] That'll be one of them, or both. [*Arranging her hair at the glass.*] Well, I can but explain what has happened, and throw myself on their mercy—only Mrs. Burleigh hasn't got any. [*Looks out of window.*] Hullo, it's a messenger boy! Now what in the name of wonder—these bridge collapses are too shattering. [*Opens door, goes half through it and talks out.*] That a special messenger, Naylor? Is he waiting an answer? Oh, thanks.

[*Shuts door and comes forward with letter.*] Who ——? Kitty Chorton! Now this is the *last* straw! [*Reads.*]

DEAR M—m—m—I've been lunching at the Mol-

tons' and have just torn home to send you this. Miss Burleigh was at the luncheon, and told me that her mother was going to play bridge with you this afternoon. Dear Mrs. Ashdown, don't please be angry with me, but I *can't* play with that woman. I played with her two nights ago at the Fullers', and unfortunately we cut together every time, and she was *too* rude to me. I really didn't know what I was doing, she frightened me so. Lost her temper disgracefully—anybody could see it, and I'm sure they were sorry for me, for I was quite shattered by her rudeness and her horrid sarcasm, and I told Tom on the way home that I'd rather *die* than play with that woman again. So please make some excuse for me, Dear Mrs. Ashdown, and try to forgive—Yours most apologetically, KITTY CHORTON.

[*Dropping on to a chair.*] This is too altogether charming. Sum total: Mrs. Burleigh arrives for an afternoon at bridge, and I have to inform her that she either plays double dummy with me or goes without bridge altogether. She'll *never* forgive me. Can't I put her off? She may not have started yet. [*Flies towards telephone.*] Wait! perhaps she's coming on from somewhere else. Oh! I wish I'd asked any one —the laundress—before I'd asked her. The last woman in the world that one wants to offend, not to

say infuriate. If only some one would happen in! Oh, I must tell Naylor to let in anybody—everybody. I shall *pray* for a chance bridge player to blow in.

[*Goes towards speaking-tube. Telephone bell rings.*

Oh, gracious! how that bell gets on one's nerves. [*Picks up receiver.*] Hullo! Who is it? [*Pause.*] Oh, Mrs. Burleigh. [*Pause.*] Yes, Mary Ashdown. [*Pause.*] Oh, *so* sorry. I hope it's not going to be influenza. Sounds a little like it. [*Pause.*] Of course you mustn't dream of it. Such a cold day. I can easily fill your place at the table. [*Pause.*] Oh, yes. [*Sweetly.*] Has your daughter come in from the Moltons' luncheon party yet? [*Pause.*] Yes? [*Pause.*] Well, another time, I hope. *Good*-bye.

[*Replaces receiver with energy.*

What a finished liar! No more headache than that table. Her giraffe of a daughter has told her that Kitty Chorton was coming here, and she won't play with her. Not good enough. That's the truth of it in a nut-shell. But what a blessed relief to think that I shan't have to spend the afternoon in pouring oil on her troubled temper, after all! [*Strays to window.*] I suppose I had better go across and explain matters to the Thomsons. I shall have to—no, I won't—not till to-morrow, when I've quite arranged what to tell them. I'm not going to be the fool to let any one know what a blazing success this

bridge party has been. Really—I never heard of such a thing! Two tables—then one—then cut-throat—then double dummy—and now? It's all very well, but what am I going to do with myself? I suppose—well, I may as well see if I can remember that new patience. [*Sits and shuffles.*] Let me see—eight rows—six in each—[*She begins to lay out cards, pauses—and then with sudden vehemence:*] Cats, all of them!

[*She goes on with the cards as the curtain falls.*

THE LADY TYPIST

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ROBERT GAYNOR, *an author.*
MAB GAYNOR, *his wife.*
FLORENCE GAYNOR, *his sister.*
MISS LUCY KENT, *a typewriter.*
FROOD, *a parlour-maid.*

SCENE: ROBERT GAYNOR'S *den at his house at Barnes.*

TIME: *A winter afternoon.*

THE LADY TYPIST

Curtain rises on GAYNOR *seated at his desk, bending low over his writing. He peers lower and lower through his glasses as though he had trouble in seeing. A timid knock is heard on the door.*

GAYNOR.

[*Vaguely. Continuing to write.*] Come in.

Enter FLORENCE.

GAYNOR.

Who is it?

FLORENCE.

[*Timidly.*] It's only me—Flo. Am I disturbing you?

GAYNOR.

[*Throwing down his pen and pushing back his chair.*] No, no. Come in. I can't see any more. You may switch on the light for me as you're here.

FLORENCE.

Oh, but——

GAYNOR.

[*Looking at his watch.*] Not half-past three, and too dark to see. Disgraceful! What a climate! What a climate!

FLORENCE.

It *is* dark to-day, isn't it? I—I thought you'd be wanting the light, so I came to tell you that—something's gone wrong with it.

GAYNOR.

[*Rising.*] What's gone wrong with it? [*Tryin the switches.*] Confound it, if that isn't just my luck. Of course the lights must go wrong on the darkest day of the year, when I have to do all my own scribbling into the bargain. [*Rings.*] We'll have to have the lamps, I suppose. I'll telephone through at once to Swanson's to come and see about it.

FLORENCE.

[*Hurriedly.*] Oh, one of us will be sure to see to that. Don't you trouble. I'll do it.

GAYNOR.

All right. But let it be seen to at once. What a nuisance it is! That's the worst of these wonderful inventions. When they go wrong one suffers doubly.

Enter FROOD.

FROOD.

Yes, sir?

GAYNOR.

Oh, the lights have gone wrong, Frood. Bring the lamps, please.

FROOD.

[*With an understanding look at* FLORENCE.] Yes, sir, I've got one ready.

[*Exit* FROOD, *with ill-suppressed giggle.*

GAYNOR.

[*Looking after her.*] Idiot! What's the matter with her?

FLORENCE.

[*Very innocently.*] I can't think.

GAYNOR.

By the way, I'd better speak to her about the typists. Some may answer my advertisement in person and give her a delightful opportunity for doing the wrong thing. I think I must write a book called "The Complete Bungler" and dedicate it to Frood.

FLORENCE.

Yes. You'd better give your orders clearly. I expect lots of them will call, and soon, too. They're not rare.

GAYNOR.

No, O Solomon, the female typewriter is not a *rara avis*. On the contrary, she grows on the hedges, she sprouts on the tops of omnibuses, she even grows in the Tube, I believe. But to find one who is not wholly a fool and who will fulfil all Mab's conditions—let me see, what were they? She mustn't be under forty, and there mustn't be a decent feature in her face. Squint or hump preferred—and——

FLORENCE.

Bob! I'm sure Mab never said anything of the sort.

GAYNOR.

Her anxious hints, coupled with my intimate knowledge of her disposition——

Enter FROOD *with a small lamp.*

GAYNOR.

[*Very distinctly.*] Oh, Frood, I've advertised for a secretary to take Miss Sefton's place, and it is probable that some ladies may answer the advertisement in person to-day.

FROOD.

[*Still suppressing a giggle.*] Oh, yes, sir.

GAYNOR.

Show them into the drawing-room first—or the dining-room—and bring me the name. I don't want them brought straight in here when I'm at work. Do you understand?

FROOD.

[*As before.*] Yes, sir, I understand.

GAYNOR.

[*Aside.*] That's a wonder. [*Aloud.*] And bring the big lamp as well, please.

FROOD.

[*Looking at* FLORENCE.] Oh, Mrs. Gaynor says as there's somethink gone wrong with the big lamp, sir.

FLORENCE.

Oh, yes. And I was to say would you like a couple of candles.

GAYNOR.

[*Irritably.*] What? Have all the lights in creation gone wrong? This is preposterous! Candles! Why not suggest a night-light at once? Why, in the name of wonder, can't this household be run on ordinary, reasonable lines? [*Exit* FROOD, *silently convulsed.*

FLORENCE.

Don't get cross, Bobby. Is there anything I can do?

GAYNOR.

[*Pacing.*] It's enough to make a sheep cross. First the electric light goes wrong, and then I'm told by that ill-conditioned soda-water bottle that the only decent lamp in the house won't work, and would I like a glow-worm to write by. Oh, I must chuck work for to-day. Doesn't matter—one annoyance more or less. [*Going to window.*] I may as well go out and swallow some fog.

FLORENCE.

[*Hurriedly.*] Oh no, don't go out, Bob. I shouldn't go out if I were you.

GAYNOR.

And may I ask why, being myself, I should not go out?

FLORENCE.

Well—er—er—it's so dark and foggy, and with your short sight it—it really isn't safe, you know.

GAYNOR.

Good gracious, what nonsense! It's not as dark as all that. I presume the street-lamps are still working.

FLORENCE.

Well, there may be some typists to see you presently, and you'd miss them all.

GAYNOR.

[*Going.*] I shall only take a short turn. You can keep them waiting for me.

FLORENCE.

[*Desperately.*] Oh, but Mab particularly hopes you won't go out.

GAYNOR.

Mab! I thought she said she was going out herself directly after lunch?

FLORENCE.

Y—Y—Yes. S—so she was. So she is. S—s—so she did—I mean, of course.

GAYNOR.

Is she in, or is she out? For a painfully truthful person, you appear more than a little mixed. She can't conveniently be both in and out.

FLORENCE.

No. Neither. I mean—I don't know—she's very likely to be out. I'll ask her.

GAYNOR.

It strikes me you're all bewitched. What's up? Frood can't look at me without exploding. You don't seem to know what you're saying. There's some mystery afloat. What is it? Out with it!

FLORENCE.

[*Completely flustered.*] What rubbish! There's nothing at all. Why don't you go on writing? And I—I'll go and play with poor old Twopenny. She can't get out to-day, poor mite.

GAYNOR.

I fancy she's affected by the general balminess. When I wanted to get through the dressing-room just now, she began prancing about outside her mother's door, and screaming out that I couldn't go into Mummy's room because the dressing-up things were on the bed, and I wasn't to see them.

FLORENCE.

Oh, not really? How *too* bad!

GAYNOR.

I couldn't make her out. When I begged her to put down the soft pedal and explain herself——

FLORENCE.

What *did* she say?

GAYNOR.

Said that Mummy was going to be a typewriter this afternoon, and I wasn't to be in the secret. Do *you* know what she was driving at?

FLORENCE.

Oh—just—nothing at all. You know what children are.

GAYNOR.

No. Come, come! That won't do. Twopenny is a sensible unit, and—wait!—a light dawns. Hold hard! Ha, ha! I've got it! The key to all the mysteries. Mab's up to her old pranks again. Going to dress up as a type-writing lady and take me in. Am I right or wrong?

FLORENCE.

You're perfectly ridiculous!

GAYNOR.

Ha, ha! I've guessed it. Going to take me in, is she? Just because I'm a poor blind bat. Aha! Hence all the lights going wrong. We didn't want too strong an illumination on this scene, eh? And

that's why I'm not to go out. Poor old Twopenny, she *has* given it away with a pound of tea. Ha, ha, ha!

FLORENCE.

Given what away? Don't be so absurd, Bob.

GAYNOR.

Now, now, Miss Truthful, this isn't your line. You'll only make a mess of it. Far better give in and confess.

FLORENCE.

I'm not going to do anything of the kind.

GAYNOR.

I'm awfully sorry to spoil the sport, you know. Honour bright, I am. I'm sorry Mab won't have her little joke, because . . . I say, why shouldn't she have it, and I have mine at the same time? What a lark we should have! You can keep quiet, I suppose, though you *are* the worst hand at pretending that ever I struck.

FLORENCE.

What do you want me to do?

GAYNOR.

Don't tell her I know anything about it. Let her

dress up and have her little scene, and, by Jove! I'll have some fun out of it. Capital, capital!

FLORENCE.

I call it a shame, and I'm not going to be a party to such a fraud.

GAYNOR.

You were ready enough to help in playing off a fraud on me, your own brother.

FLORENCE.

Oh, but that's different. You're a man.

GAYNOR.

[*Laughing.*] The old story. Sex against sex, whatever the other ties may be. But anyhow, you've given yourself away now. You've as good as owned up, so you may as well range yourself on my side and have a share of the fun.

FLORENCE.

Oh, what *am* I to do?

GAYNOR.

Needn't do anything but lie low. You can go out if you like, and come back when it's all over.

FLORENCE.

How can I, when I've got to help her dress up?

GAYNOR.

Ah, now you've definitely given it away

FLORENCE.

Oh, it's too bad. You made me.

GAYNOR.

All right, I made you. And now I make you my accomplice. You may as well do it gracefully. It's only a joke. Never mind your old conscience. It's always been a size too large for you. Give it a rest. After all, it's easy enough to keep quiet, isn't it? All you've got to do is to help her dress, if you won't go out, and let her be shown in here as soon as possible. I'll be reading, if I can see by this rotten old lamp. [*Holds a paper to the light.*] No, it's impossible. Where's Twopenny?

FLORENCE.

In the nursery, little wretch. It's all her fault.

GAYNOR.

I'll go and have a game with her. Send Frood up to tell me when all's ready, and mind you don't turn a hair. This is going to be *my* lark.

FLORENCE.

I do think it's a horrid shame——

GAYNOR.

Fiddle-sticks! [*Exit.*

FLORENCE.

To make her dress up all for nothing. Worse than nothing—to have the tables turned on her like that. Won't she be savage with me if she finds out that I knew!

Enter MAB *excitedly.*

MAB.

I say, he's just gone up to the nursery. You told him I was out?

FLORENCE.

Y—Yes. I think I said I thought you were out.

MAB.

Thought! I told you to say I'd gone out an hour ago, and wouldn't be back to tea. I hope you didn't make a mess of it—you hopelessly truthful old blunderer.

FLORENCE.

Oh, I'm sure it—it's all right, dear

MAB.

Well, anyhow he hasn't seen me. Now's the time to go and dress. It won't take two minutes. Everything's ready. Come along.

FLORENCE.

[*Flatly and hanging back.*] Y-y-y-yes, everything's ready.

MAB.

You're not repenting, are you? Flo, it's going to be such a lark. Don't go and have scruples at the eleventh hour, when it isn't even you who are going to take him in. What harm can it do, anyway?

FLORENCE.

None whatever. That's just it.

MAB.

Just what? I don't believe you like my doing it, for some abstruse reason or other. You *are* a funny old Quakeress!

FLORENCE.

But I *do* like it, of course I do.

MAB.

What's the matter then? You've gone all flat.

FLORENCE.

[*Almost in tears.*] Oh, it's too bad. I *will* tell you. He's found it all out through Twopenny.

MAB.

What? How?

FLORENCE.

Found her guarding your room, and the little silly went and said that he wasn't to go in, because the things you were going to dress up in as a typewriter were in there. So of course he asked questions and —and found everything out.

MAB.

Oh, Flo, how sickening! And I told her not to say a word to Dada. It's my own fault. I oughtn't to have let her see or hear anything about it. Poor little darling, how clever of her to have guarded my room! But, oh, I *am* disappointed!

FLORENCE.

I knew you would be.

MAB.

Why on earth didn't you tell me at once?

FLORENCE.

[*With a rush.*] Because, the worst of it is that he

wanted me to let you go on with it, and not tell you that he had found out, so that he could pretend to be taken in, and really take you in.

MAB.

Oh!

FLORENCE.

Yes. The laugh was to be all on his side, only I—I couldn't.

MAB.

Oh, how disgraceful! I should never have forgiven you.

FLORENCE.

Just what I felt about it. I couldn't bear to deceive you when it came to the point.

MAB.

I should think not. It would have been *too* mean. [*Going towards door.*] I shall just go straight up and tell him——

Enter FROOD. *They collide in the doorway.*

FROOD.

[*Straightening her cap.*] Oh, beg pardon, I'm sure. [*Looks round the room.*] Has Mr. Gaynor gone out, Miss?

MAB.

No. What is it, Frood?

FROOD.

Oh, it's only a young person to see Mr. Gaynor, M'm. Miss Kent was the name, I think.

MAB.

Was she—has she come in answer to the advertisement?

FROOD.

So she says, M'm.

MAB.

Well, go and tell Mr. Gaynor—no, wait! [*To* FLORENCE.] I've got an inspiration. [*To* FROOD. Where is she?

FROOD.

In the dining-room, M'm.

MAB.

Ask her to wait there for a few minutes and then come back here, Frood, quickly. I'm not going to dress up just yet.

FROOD.

No, M'm.

MAB.

But don't bring any more lights till I tell you, whatever happens.

FROOD.

All right, M'm. [*Exit.*]

FLORENCE.

What *are* you going to do?

MAB.

Now, *now* for the lark of my life! I'm going to take him in after all, only worse. Listen. Frood shall fetch him down at once, this Miss Kent shall be shown in here, and he'll think it's me dressed up. [*Hugging* FLORENCE.] Isn't it lovely? Isn't it scrumptious?

FLORENCE.

But of course he'll see it's not you.

MAB.

[*Turning down the lamp.*] My dear, he won't see anything by this light. Unless she happens to be a dwarf or a giantess ——

Re-enter FROOD.

MAB.

We'll find out. Frood, what's the young lady like, this Miss Kent? Quickly.

FROOD.

She's not a *young* lady, M'm. About forty, I should say.

MAB.

Tall? Short?

FROOD.

Not to say tall. About my 'eighth, M'm. Seems to 'ave a crool cold on 'er, poor thing.

MAB.

Excellent! And your height is about mine. Couldn't be better. Go upstairs to the nursery, Frood, and tell Mr. Gaynor that a lady is waiting to see him. As soon as he comes in here, show Miss Kent up.

FROOD.

Very good, M'm. [*Exit.*]

FLORENCE.

But supposing he says silly things to her, thinking it's you?

MAB.

[*Dragging forward a screen.*] All the better. Serve him right. And I can always explain to her afterwards. Now then, we get behind this screen and listen to the fun. Don't you breathe.

FLORENCE.

Oh, Mab, is it right?

MAB.

Quick! Don't stand there arguing. Wasn't she sent by Providence in the very nick of time, bless her every button?

FLORENCE.

[*Clutching her.*] Mab, he's coming!

MAB.

Keep quiet, or I'll never forgive you. Not a sound.

[*They crouch behind the screen, facing the audience. Enter* GAYNOR.

GAYNOR.

[*At door, to maid without.*] Yes, ask her to come in here, please. [*Placing a chair.*] Great sport, this. She'll want her back to the light, poor darling. She shall have it. I can afford to give her points. [*Sitting at desk.*] The thing is, to look perfectly serious. Not the flicker of a smile. That'll be for afterwards. Great Scott, how I shall laugh! Here she comes. Now then, my beauty.

Enter FROOD.

FROOD.

[*Announcing*] Miss Kent.

Enter MISS KENT, *an elderly woman in dark coat and skirt, motor-cap, spotted veil, spectacles, fur boa, and long-fingered cotton gloves. She has a bad cold in the head, and mispronounces her words accordingly.*

GAYNOR.

Come in, please. Will you sit there?

MISS KENT.

[*Nervously.*] Good evening.

GAYNOR.

Good evening, Miss er ——?

MISS KENT.

Kent—Miss Kent. I saw your advertisement in the *Morning Post*, and as I live quite near—. [*She sits.*]

GAYNOR.

You thought you'd look in. Quite so. Consequently you're the first applicant that I've seen.

MISS KENT.

I hoped I should be about the first, as I was probably the nearest.

GAYNOR.

The dearest! Well, with regard to terms——

MISS KENT.

I mean the nearest—the closest to.

GAYNOR.

Ah, I beg your pardon. My mistake entirely. I'm afraid you're suffering from a bad cold.

MISS KENT.

Oh, it's nothing much. It has been bad, but it's nearly gone now.

GAYNOR.

Ah, I am glad it's nearly gone. We shall understand each other better when it's quite gone. Now with regard to references. Of course you've brought some with you.

MISS KENT.

Well, no. I'm afraid not. I've always worked for one firm so far, and I'm still working there, but the manager's been ill for some time——

GAYNOR.

The firm has become infirm. I see. Well, let us waive the references. What are your strong points, so to say?

MISS KENT.

Well, I'm a very rapid worker. My speed averages about eighteen hundred. And, living so close by, I could be here in good time in the morning.

GAYNOR.

What do you call good time?

MISS KENT.

Oh, any time that suited you.

GAYNOR.

But almost every time is bad, to my mind. I hate time. But perhaps I had better tell you at once that there are several qualities which I require in my secretary, but which I did not insert in my advertisement for — — er various reasons. To begin with, I require a lady not over twenty-five years of age.

[MAB *and* FLORENCE *show signs of growing discomfort. Dumb pantomime on their part through ensuing scene.*

MISS KENT.

[*Frankly.*] Well, I *am* twenty-seven, but——

GAYNOR.

But you would make further reductions?

MISS KENT.

Oh!

GAYNOR.

You don't suggest that age on sight. Of course the light's very bad in here to-day. No doubt you would appear much less in a good light. But let us waive the question of age. I may mention a few more items which I should have to make a point of. For instance, my secretary must be very attractive in personal appearance. Unfortunately I am so constructed that I find it impossible to work if anything distresses my eye.

MISS KENT.

[*Coldly.*] Oh, indeed!

GAYNOR.

So I really require a very dainty, engaging young person. I like—er—fluffy hair—pink cheeks—blue eyes, if possible.

MISS KENT.

Of course there was no mention of anything of this kind in the advertisement.

GAYNOR.

No. Of course it's rather a difficult point, you understand. Another thing: She must have what I

call an affectionate disposition. I don't like people of a hard, proud nature. I can't do with it. It grates on me.

MISS KENT.

[*Rising.*] Oh! I understood you to require a *lady*, who could work a typewriter, take down in shorthand——

GAYNOR.

Yours is hardly a short hand, is it?

MISS KENT.

[*Hastily stuffing hands in her muff.*] That seems to be rather beside the point. [*Backing.*] I don't think I need take up any more of your time.

GAYNOR.

Oh, don't go. Stay and have a whisky-and-soda. Perhaps you smoke? I ought to have said that I really prefer a secretary who smokes.

MISS KENT.

Thanks. I will not detain you.

GAYNOR.

[*Barring the door.*] Oh, but it's unkind to leave so hurriedly. I don't really feel that I know you yet, and I should have liked to introduce you to my wife.

Of course it would not be necessary to repeat to her all that I have said to you.

MISS KENT.

[*With enforced calm.*] Oblige me by moving away from that door at once, if you please.

[FLORENCE *tries to advance.* MAB *holds her*

GAYNOR.

[*Bursting into laughter.*] Throw it up, darling! I know all about it. [*He plucks off her motor-cap and veil.*] Splendid get-up!

MISS KENT.

Help! Help! He's mad!

GAYNOR.

It's excellent, but it's no good. Say you'll forgive me, and I'll own up too.

[*Flings his arms round her and kisses her.* MISS KENT *shrieks repeatedly.* MAB *and* FLORENCE *rush forward.*

GAYNOR.

[*Looking from* MAB *to* MISS KENT *in horror.*] Great Scott in Heaven!

MAB.

[*To* MISS KENT, *breathlessly.*] It's all right—he's all right. He thought it was me! I thought——!

MISS KENT.

[*Falling onto chair and drumming with her heels on the floor, hysterically.*] Help! Help! They're mad! They're all mad!

FLORENCE.

[*Fanning her with her motor-cap.*] You're all right. It's only a joke, if you'll let us explain.

MISS KENT.

[*Covering her face with motor-cap and screaming.*] Take him away! Take him away!

GAYNOR.

[*Helplessly, to* MAB.] You see what you've done! I'm going to leave you to wind it up, my dear. [*Slinks towards door.*]

MAB.

Then I shall engage her, coward!

[*She approaches* MISS KENT *and* FLORENCE, *as* GAYNOR *softly opens the door.*]

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